

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT

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Contra Aid

RICHARD THRELKELD: Central America has been more out of the news than in the news lately, but the fighting goes on at the edges of Nicaragua and the charges and counter-charges, most recently the Sandinistas charging the U. S. supplied the contra guerrillas

with a missile that shot down a Sandinista helicopter.

Well, today, Washington denied that and, as ABC's John McWethy reports, countered with some charges of its own about Cuban involvement in the fighting.

JOHN McWETHY: This is the kind of missile, a Soviet made SAM 7, that the contra rebels used to shoot down a Nicaraguan helicopter earlier this week. Today Secretary of State Shultz denied that the weapon was supplied covertly by the U. S. But he was clearly delighted that the American backed rebels were successful.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: And they have gotten ahold of missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and they have figured out how to use them. And they've used it effectively in this case, and I say fine; I'm all for it.

McWETHY: In the MI-8 helicopter, similar to this, that was shot down in the fighting, at least two Cubans were killed. U. S. intelligence sources tell ABC News these two are by no means the first Cubans to die in the fighting. More than 75 others have returned to Havana in coffins over the last three years. Analysts say some were killed in combat, some were murdered; others died in accidents out in the field.

Shultz, who called the growing involvement of Cubans in combat a serious problem for the U. S., was asked what the Reagan administration planned to do about it.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, I think the first step is to be sure that people see it and understand it and believe it.

McWETHY: He hinted the next step might be to ask Congress to change the kind of aid the Reagan administration is allowed to give the contras. The 27 million now being

provided does not include weapons or ammunition. That kind of help, analysts claim, is coming from other countries, not from the U. S. government.

In Nicaragua today, President Daniel Ortega accused the U. S. of seriously escalating what he calls the war of aggression against his country. He and others claim the missile that shot down the helicopter was supplied by the CIA.

To support that contention, the Nicaraguans released a poor quality videotape of contras learning how to fire the SAM-7 missile. The Nicaraguans claim the instructors are Americans working for the CIA.

Late today, the State Department handed out nine pieces of quotations allegedly from Nicaraguan defectors. The quotations tell of how pervasive Cubans have become in running Nicaragua's military. State Department officials say the material was declassified by the CIA today. It's part of a political effort by the Reagan administration to again turn up the heat on Nicaragua and Cuba.

John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.